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# Bohemians: Greenwich Village and *The Masses*

Joanna Levin

Chapman University, [jlevin@chapman.edu](mailto:jlevin@chapman.edu)

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## CHAPTER 8

### *Bohemians* *Greenwich Village and The Masses*

*Joanna Levin*

Ever since Rodolphe, Henri Murger's prototypical struggling writer, stood before the grave of Mimi, his lost love and partner in the romance of bohemia, crying, "Oh my youth, it is you that is being buried," *la vie bohème* has represented a fabled transitional period between youth and mature adulthood in many an individual life, memoir, and *Bildungsroman* (Seigel 45). Similarly, ever since its inception in the wake of the 1830 Revolution in France, bohemianism – as a larger subcultural movement – has flourished during periods of historical transition. It was in the tumultuous lead-up to the Civil War that *la vie bohème* first took root in the United States (in a basement beer hall beneath the sidewalks of Broadway and Bleecker and on the pages of the New York *Saturday Press*), but it was during the 1910s, the decade known for ushering in a host of radical and modernist movements, that bohemia assumed its most famous American form in New York City's Greenwich Village.

The winding streets and dilapidated buildings of Greenwich Village preserved a romantically remote past, one that opposed the strict rationality of New York City's commanding grid pattern. Seventh Avenue had not yet been extended to make way for the West Side subway, and rents were relatively inexpensive. As Floyd Dell later recalled in his nostalgic retrospective *Love in Greenwich Village* (1926), "Here life went to a gentler pace, / And dreams and dreamers found a place" (15). These material conditions enabled the creation of a bohemia that marked a significant, if uneven, transition between the Victorian and the modern, the genteel and the experimental. A liminal space that registered a wide range of social, political, and cultural shifts, this bohemia sought to unite, in Malcolm Cowley's words, "two types of revolt, the individual and the social – or the aesthetic and the political, or the revolt against puritanism and the revolt against capitalism" (66). Indeed, as Cowley reports in his literary history *Exile's Return* (1934), bohemianism was itself in transition during the 1910s, and the war – and

accompanying Espionage and Sedition Acts – hastened the separation of the two currents that had been so richly intermingled before 1917.

This chapter traces the convergence of “the revolt against puritanism” and “the revolt against capitalism” in the 1910s, focusing on the most celebrated American bohemia – Greenwich Village – and on *The Masses*, the Village periodical that provided the most influential expression of the double-edged bohemian revolt. The effort to combine the personal and the political, the artistic and the social helped fuel a host of interconnected movements and alliances within the bohemian milieu, and the bohemians called upon both Marx and Freud in the effort to promote revolutionary change. Often riddled with internal contradictions and susceptible to forces of cultural co-optation and containment, the quest for bohemian liberation in the 1910s inevitably fell short of the Villagers’ ambitious, utopian ideals; nevertheless, the bohemians were astute social critics, recognizing that liberation required them to confront interlocking oppressions based on class, gender, nationality, and race. They sought a more inclusive, egalitarian America, and their art and writing – and their legendary exploits, recounted in numerous memoirs – continued to inspire later generations of left-leaning artists, writers, and intellectuals.

While projecting its ideals into the future, the bohemia of Greenwich Village also had roots in the past. At the turn into the twentieth century, commentators routinely identified *la vie bohème* with selected art studios, rooming houses, and ethnic restaurants in the Village and on the Lower East Side. Of bohemian Paris, the original homeland of bohemia, Jerrold Seigel has argued that bohemia “grew up where the boundaries of bourgeois life were murky and uncertain” (10–11), and in these regions of Manhattan (and in various locales throughout the United States), bohemia also helped to map a series of contact zones between a host of overlapping oppositions: the bohemian and the bourgeois, the native and the foreign, the national and the regional, propriety and license, wealth and poverty, new and traditional womanhood, the commercial and the aesthetic, and art and life (Levin 125–338). To a large extent, however, the *fin de siècle* romance of bohemia in the United States had been absorbed by the genteel tradition since the turn of the century, its oppositional, anti-bourgeois energies muted if not entirely contained. In 1910, for example, George Cary Eggleston described the Authors Club of New York City as a refined establishment that embodied “the better kind of Bohemianism – the Bohemianism of liberty, not license” (177). Similarly, a 1911 article in *Bookman* magazine titled “The Message of Bohemia” celebrated the vision of the painter F. Louis Mora, whose “Bohemia . . . rests upon a superstructure of exalted

sympathy” and cultivated aestheticism. Yet another bohemianism, that of liberty and subversion, also persisted, which the article acknowledged by criticizing the version of bohemia evident in John Sloan’s art. A member of Robert Henri’s “Ashcan School” of painters, Sloan, much to the chagrin of *Bookman*, “look[ed] upon a Bohemia at war with society” (Baury 265).

It was this rebellious bohemia that Sloan helped to re-ignite as a contributor-editor of the new socialist periodical *The Masses* (1911–17). As Cowley affirmed, the magazine became the “intellectual center” of the bohemian Village of the 1910s, representing both the personal and the social, the artistic and the political varieties of revolt that were so “hard to distinguish” in the prewar period (66). Such periodicals as *Bruno’s Bohemia*, *The Ink-Pot*, and *The Quill* more insistently advertised *la vie bohème* (and set the stage for the commodification of the Village),<sup>1</sup> but *The Masses* gave the Villagers a sense of collective purpose and self-definition. Together with such Village institutions as the Liberal Club, Polly’s Restaurant, and Mabel Dodge’s 5th Avenue salon, *The Masses* facilitated social interactions, intensified political commitments, and fostered a sense of group identity.

As Max Eastman later recalled in his memoir *Enjoyment of Living* (1948), Sloan was part of the “whimsical bunch” of artists and writers that invited him to edit *The Masses* in 1912. Eastman cherished the “sense of universal revolt and regeneration, of the just-before-dawn of a new day in American art and literature and living-of-life as well as in politics” that characterized the bohemian group (394). As a newly minted PhD graduate in philosophy from Columbia, where he’d studied with the renowned pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, Eastman believed that the moment was ripe for a new publication that dedicated itself to a liberatory fusion of art and socialist politics, bohemianism and revolution. To achieve this goal, Eastman and such contributor-editors as Floyd Dell, Inez Haynes Gillmore, John Reed, John Sloan, Mary Heaton Vorse, and Art Young sought to produce, in Eastman’s formulation, a lively blend of art and political commentary – or “Knowledge and Revolution” – that would support and inspire transformative political and social action. The “knowledge” embraced by *The Masses* would be a flexible “experimental knowledge,” not the ossified residue of the past. Such knowledge would, directly or indirectly, help foment the coming “revolution,” which the periodical defined as “a change [not] necessarily decorated with blood and thunder,” but one that would, nevertheless, result in “a radical democratization of industry and society, made possible by the growth of capitalism, but to be accomplished only when and if the spirit of liberty and rebellion is sufficiently awakened in the classes which are now oppressed” (M. Eastman, “Knowledge” Dec. 1912: 5).

An alliance with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) enabled the bohemians of *The Masses* to conceive of themselves as active participants in the class struggle, despite the largely bourgeois backgrounds of the contributor-editors. At the time when Eastman first steered *The Masses* away from the "yellow" socialism of the previous editor, Piet Vlag, the Wobblies had recently prevailed in the textile workers' strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts. Formed in 1905, the IWW sought, in the words of its charismatic leader, William "Big Bill" Haywood, "to confederate the workers of this country into a working-class movement in possession of the economic powers, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution without regard to capitalist masters" (qtd. in Kornbluh 1). Involvement with the Wobblies not only gave the bohemians of *The Masses* access to the front lines of the class struggle (through its sympathetic coverage of IWW-led strikes), but also vindicated the bohemians' belief in the mutually constitutive properties of social protest and artistic production. Well before their involvement with the Greenwich Villagers, the Wobblies regularly used songs, poems, stories, cartoons, and skits to dramatize their message. Max Eastman later recollected that Haywood, during a memorable evening at Mabel Dodge's salon, outlined his idea of the communal "proletarian art" the IWW had already begun to produce: "The highest ideal of an artist will be to write a song which the workers sing, to compose a drama which great throngs of the workers can perform out of doors" (*Venture* 210–11). In 1913, in the midst of a IWW-led strike of 25,000 silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, the bohemians of *The Masses* seized their opportunity to contribute their own artistry to the cause. When Haywood despaired about the lack of coverage of the strike in the mainstream press, Mabel Dodge recalled suggesting: "Why don't you hire a great hall and re-enact the strike over here? Show the whole thing: the closed mills, the gunmen, the murder of the striker [killed by a policeman], the funeral" (Luhan, *Movers* 188). Haywood endorsed the plan, and John Reed volunteered to organize the pageant. Hoping to raise money, bolster the morale of the strikers, and sway public opinion, the Wobblies and bohemians created a vibrant spectacle that united art and politics, the famed Paterson Pageant at Madison Square Garden that drew 15,000 people and led Hutchins Hapgood to declare, "This kind of thing makes us hope for a real democracy, where self-expression in industry and art among the masses may become a rich reality" (*Victorian* 351). By all accounts the pageant was a dramatic success, though in practical terms, it did little to buoy the strikers' cause, and the strike itself was soon lost (Levin 359). Yet a vital mixture of art and politics, bohemianism and socialist agitation – the ideal fusion glimpsed,

if not perfectly realized, during the Paterson Pageant – remained the goal of *The Masses*.

Nevertheless, some readers looked askance at the periodical's fusion of bohemianism and politics. One reader noted, "The MASSES seems to me to have a predilection for long hair and a flowing red tie – a predilection that is picturesque, and an amiable weakness, at worst, in a mere Bohemian; but it is distinctly reprehensible in a revolutionist" (E. R. Cheney). The phrase "a mere Bohemian" seems to have stuck in Eastman's craw; years later he was still trying to dispel "Bunk about Bohemia" (1934), insisting, "It is not Bohemianism, but mere Bohemianism against which the scientific revolutionist protests . . . It is the substitution of this personal revolt . . . for the practical scientific work of mind or hand that the revolution demands of every free man in its desperate hour – it is that which is to be condemned." Eastman agreed with the correspondant from 1916 that "mere Bohemianism" could potentially derail the class struggle if "personal revolt" proved too all-consuming a distraction; nevertheless, he maintained that bohemianism could in fact complement revolutionary efforts. "The wish to live a free and real life, and to cherish and communicate its qualities in works of art, deserves the respect of every revolutionist," Max Eastman asserted, adding, "A Bohemian life, in this good sense, is precisely the kind of life that they hope to make natural to the race of man after the artificialities that spring out of our money culture are removed" ("Bunk," 202, 200). Further, arguing in *The Masses* that the bourgeoisie constituted a class "whose power is property and whose armor is respectability," Eastman implicitly justified combining the two types of bohemian revolt: the political revolt against the capitalist system and the personal, aestheticized revolt against bourgeois respectability that had long motivated many a would-be bohemian to *épater le bourgeois* ("Utopian").

Support of the IWW was just one of the many ways that the bohemia of *The Masses* sought to challenge bourgeois manners, ideologies, and property relations. Whether critiquing the movement toward military preparedness in advance of America's entry into World War I ("Business and War") or insisting that "the American invasion of Mexico was undoubtedly forced by our own dollar patriots" (Reed, "Legendary"), *The Masses* sought to expose the workings of the all-pervasive profit motive in American politics. In the realm of culture, the magazine sought to combat the effects of commerce on art, literature, and journalism. Defining itself against the "money-making press," the periodical saw its very existence as a provocation and challenge to more mainstream publications. As Mark S. Morrisson has argued, *The Masses* forged a "counterpublic sphere," one that sought

to mobilize and co-opt the institutions of modern mass publishing for its radical agenda (15). With respect to such accomplished contributor-editors as Art Young, *The Masses* proudly declared, "Young belongs to the class of artists . . . who stifle in the air of the capitalist editorial office" (Seltzer). Frustration with the commercial press also led John Reed to *The Masses*. Reed regularly wrote for the *American Magazine*, but when that periodical rejected one of his stories, he sought out Eastman. At the time, Eastman still questioned the literary value of work that could not be sold on the market, but he quickly recognized that Reed's "vivid and restrained" narrative – a "simple story of a New York prostitute" that avoided moralizing commentary and refused to punish its protagonist – was notable for addressing a "significant phase of American life that no other magazine would dare to mention unless sanctimoniously." The story, "Where the Heart Is," convinced Eastman "that there really was a creative literature stifled by commercial journalism" and the continued sway of the genteel tradition (*Enjoyment* 406–7). He insisted that contributors "who can make good money out of the money-making magazines put their very best things in *The Masses* for nothing," all for the chance to "make this world more free and more happy" ("Masses Versus").

Simultaneously defying commercial imperatives and the puritanism they associated with the cultural establishment, *The Masses* provided occasion for the unleashing of freedom and happiness, both on and off its pages. In the effort to raise funds for the nonprofit magazine, for example, Floyd Dell helped to organize a series of costume balls that he termed "Pagan Routs"; modeled on the Quatre-Arts balls of the Latin Quarter, Dell affirmed, "They were spontaneously joyous and deliberately beautiful, focusing in a mood of playfulness the passion for loveliness that was one of the things that had brought us to the Village" (*Homecoming* 325). According to Eastman, "those *Masses* balls were gay and tumultuous affairs where all bars against 'Greenwich Villageism' were let down" (*Enjoyment* 570). His code phrase for bohemianism, "Greenwich Villageism" was the unruly cultural force that Eastman sought both to harness and contain in his role as editor of *The Masses* and proponent of radical socialist change (*Enjoyment* 418).

To this end, Eastman largely resisted John Reed's proposed mission statement for *The Masses* (which announced that "the broad purpose of *The Masses* is a social one: to everlastingly attack old systems, old morals, old prejudices"), fearing that the statement smacked too much of mere bohemianism and revolt for revolt's sake. Eastman incorporated some of Reed's phrases into the new masthead statement, but deemphasized the negative

rejection of the "old" in favor of a positive commitment to finding "true causes":

THIS MAGAZINE IS OWNED AND PUBLISHED COOPERATIVELY BY ITS EDITORS. IT HAS NO DIVIDENDS TO PAY, AND NOBODY IS TRYING TO MAKE MONEY OUT OF IT. A REVOLUTIONARY AND NOT A REFORM MAGAZINE; A MAGAZINE WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR AND NO RESPECT FOR THE RESPECTABLE; FRANK, ARROGANT, IMPERTINENT, SEARCHING FOR TRUE CAUSES; A MAGAZINE DIRECTED AGAINST RIGIDITY AND DOGMA WHEREVER IT IS FOUND; PRINTING WHAT IS TOO NAKED OR TRUE FOR A MONEY-MAKING PRESS; A MAGAZINE WHOSE FINAL POLICY IS TO DO AS IT PLEASES AND CONCILIATE NOBODY, NOT EVEN ITS READERS – THERE IS A FIELD FOR THIS PUBLICATION IN AMERICA. (*Enjoyment* 421)

As the statement proudly proclaimed, *The Masses* did not seek profits, but it was costly to produce, and Eastman later admitted the ironic truth that "this revolutionary magazine lived as it was born, on gifts solicited by me from individual members of the bourgeoisie" (*Enjoyment* 455).

Still, the periodical hoped to become an increasingly viable commodity and influential shaper of public opinion. Mailed to subscribers and sold in bookstores, street stands, and the subway, *The Masses* boasted relatively large sales until it began, in Eastman's words, to be "kicked out of various places" – from the subway stands in New York to the reading rooms at Harvard – due to its subversive content (*Enjoyment* 474). While such suppression stymied the potential influence of *The Masses*, it nonetheless reinforced the classic bohemian–bourgeois opposition, drawing clear battle lines between the bohemians and the mainstream establishment. The immediate occasion for *The Masses*' suppression by Ward and Gow, the distribution company that ran New York City subway and elevated newstands, was an allegedly "unpatriotic" cartoon (likely Art Young's "Millions for Defense," which featured a horned, Satanic figure – identified as "War" – carrying a smiling, black-hatted business man on his back) and a "blasphemous" poem published in February 1916 ("Suppressed"). *The Masses* argued that the boycott was "one more entering wedge by which . . . all of what we call the interests, are closing in on the press" ("Are We Indecent"). Dell, for his part, used the occasion of the Ward and Gow boycott to reflect on *The Masses*' editorial policy and understanding of its readership. He played it a bit coy, but nonetheless voiced the earnest hope that the magazine would live up to its name and have mass appeal: "I really do not see why, when twenty people like us are pleased by a story or a poem,



twenty million more people should not be equally pleased" ("Deadly Sin"). In this same issue, Eastman also sought to dissociate the bohemia of *The Masses* from the charge of cultural elitism and to highlight the inevitable overlap between the aesthetic and the social. Years before sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed his influential theory of "cultural capital," Eastman called into question the aesthetic judgments – and indeed the very idea of aesthetic autonomy – that earlier generations of bohemians had embraced:

Literary young persons have usually directed [their] scorn against philistinism, the middle class monotones, and any provincial obtuseness to those finer values discriminated by the cultured and by those who possess Art. But in our day the full-blooded young persons have got their scorn directed against a more important evil – against the ground-plan of money-competition built on industrial slavery which orders our civilization, and makes all our judgments-of-value, even the most cultured, impure. Indeed we suspect everything that is called culture – we suspect it of the taint of pecuniary elegance. We have armed our critical judgment with Thorstein Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class" . . . This theory had taught us to how to see through "culture" . . . [and to recognize] the fact that the whole standard of judgment by which art is judged was evolved in the parlor play of a petty minority of the race left idle by the tragic and real bitterness of life's experience accorded to the majority who never spoke. ("Rebecca West" 30)

Whereas earlier bohemians had recognized that middle-class "philistinism" supported the bourgeois status quo by fueling a change-resistant narrow-mindedness, Eastman surveyed a broader swath of the socioeconomic landscape, lamenting the absence of proletarian art and criticism ("the majority who never spoke") and recognizing the mutual interdependence of the socioeconomic hierarchy wrought by "money-competition" and the cultural hierarchy of "finer values" and discriminating tastes. In place of "over-exquisite and rather priggish aesthetics" that had defined bourgeois high culture, Eastman looked toward a "coarser and more universal reality," upholding Walt Whitman (himself a proud member of the first self-identified bohemia in the United States in the late 1850s) and his "affirmative and universal sympathy with all realities of life that [lie] far out and beyond culture in the mind's adventure" ("Rebecca West" 30). For Eastman, "if Art and not Life becomes the center of interest," then the realm of the aesthetic – and, by extension, the bohemia that supported it – ceased to have vitality and purpose ("What is the Matter").

In his unpublished manuscript from 1913, Hutchins Hapgood elaborated upon the notion that "life" ultimately trumped "art" in Village

bohemianism. According to Hapgood, "the Artistic Temperament which, in the [Parisian] Latin Quarter, lingers on the simple note of human pleasure and art for art's sake, becomes in the New Bohemia, the adoration of life for the sake of Causes, Reforms or Revolutions, and an adoration of art not for the sake of art but for the sake of Life" ("New Bohemia"). Though Eastman himself sought to balance "art and propaganda, poetry and practical effort," his prioritizing of "life" and "causes" over art for art's sake did not sit well with all of the contributor-editors of *The Masses*. As Eastman later recounted, "a war between the Bohemian art-rebels and against the socialists who love art" broke out at *The Masses* when some of the artists objected to having political captions placed alongside their drawings. Several artists resigned from the magazine, but Art Young steadfastly asserted, "For my part, I don't care to be connected with a publication that does not try to point the way out of a sordid materialistic world" (M. Eastman, *Enjoyment* 548).

Alongside socialism, the cause that most animated Village bohemians was feminism. As Eastman announced in one of his earliest editorials, "the question of sex equality, the economic, social, political independence of woman stands by itself, parallel and equal in importance to any other question of the day. The awakening and liberation of woman is a revolution in the very process of life" ("Knowledge," Jan. 1913: 5). *The Masses* so regularly championed various forms of feminist activism – from the fight for women's suffrage to birth control – that five prominent Village feminists placed an advertisement in the February 1916 issue calling on women readers to donate five or more dollars as a New Year's gift to the magazine: "Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Art Young, and the rest are genuine warm-hearted Feminists . . . In cartoon, in verse, in editorial, in story THE MASSES has stood for us all along the line as no other magazine in America has" (Carpenter et al.). For the bohemians, this feminist revolution promised to fuse the personal and the political, the aesthetic and the social, enabling both the revolt against puritanism and the revolt against capitalism.

Village feminism – and the related free love movement – defied restrictive social norms by challenging double standards of sexual morality and recognizing the legitimacy of female desire. *The Masses* regularly flouted puritanism, publishing erotic verse by women poets (often alongside ads for books on female sexuality). One such poem, Nan Apotheker's "Bohemia – From Another Angle," explicitly claimed *la vie bohème* – and its informal sexual relationships – for women by stressing that the female speaker, an Italian immigrant named "Rosa," has her own desires and dreams:

"I LIVE in Greenwich Village – / I am a young girl – passionate, full / of desires – / In my slope-ceiled attic I work all day . . . / I have a lover. / You hear that? / We live together, and I have no wedding ring . . . / Together we live on bread and cheese and dream our fire-tipped dreams." Little theater productions, in both Provincetown and the Village, also enabled the bohemians to reflect upon, satirize, and promote many of their cherished ideals, including the widespread Village belief that psychoanalysis would provide the key to women's sexual liberation. In George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell's early Provincetown play, *Suppressed Desires*, one female character joyfully exclaims, "think of living in Libido – in conflict with petrified moral codes!" (290).

The revolt against capitalism also contributed to the ideology of free love and the disavowal of "sex-possession," which the bohemians considered, as V. F. Calverton put it, "one of the basic property relations in our bourgeois world" (qtd. in Aaron 168). Simultaneously defying puritanical restrictions and bourgeois notions of ownership, the ideal of free love encouraged Villagers to create equal partnerships between men and women in heterosexual relationships, without any legal or social constraints. Similarly, for the Villagers, access to birth control not only allowed women to flout sexual double standards, but it also gave working-class women and their families greater control over their destinies; as Emma Goldman told the judge before being sentenced to fifteen days in jail for delivering a lecture on birth control (in a statement that was then reprinted in *The Masses*), the fight for birth control was part of "the great modern social conflict, . . . a war of the oppressed and disinherited of the earth against their enemies, capitalism and the state, a war for the seat at the table of life, a war for well-being, for beauty, for liberty" (Goldman, "Emma").

Nonetheless, the personal and the political did not always blend so seamlessly for the bohemians. The ideal of free love often proved difficult to realize in practice, and sexual and professional jealousies, as well as conflicting expectations, ultimately destroyed many of these unions. A recurrent subject of contemporary poems and stories, in plays performed in bohemian little theaters, and in subsequent memoirs, Village relationships were often unable to withstand ever-shifting desires for autonomy and intimacy, sexual freedom and fidelity, dominance and submission, tradition and experimentalism, feminism and bohemianism. Mabel Dodge, for instance, tried to accept her then-lover John Reed's relationships with other women, noting, "before I loved him I talked logically enough about 'invading other people's' personalities – about how wrong it was to want anyone to be different from what they are," but she soon recognized that his infidelity

compromised her own happiness. In a searching letter to fellow bohemian Neith Boyce, she wondered whether "free love" simply amounted to a modern justification for traditional male prerogatives – and whether women should thus insist on fidelity in the name of "feminism" and self-respect – or whether women should "get over" asking for monogamy in the interest of more enlightened sexual practices (qtd. in Trimberger 110). "A Quarrel," a story she published anonymously in *The Masses*, further questioned whether the reality of "free love" lived up to the ideal. The female lover initially appears to assert autonomy: "I have made a mistake by trying to satisfy myself to you. It hasn't been fair to you or to myself. I must find something to do besides loving you . . . I don't want to bother you anymore." Ultimately, though, her declarations emerge as a passive-aggressive attempt to derive strength – or "stolen power" – from her lover's pain at the thought that she might have "other interests than himself" (Luhan, "Quarrel").<sup>2</sup> The story refuses to excuse the female lover for her part in the quarrel, but it plays on what became an all too common expectation in free-love scenarios. As Nina Miller has observed, in many bohemian narratives, "situations of Free Love repeatedly resolve themselves into a conventionally gendered model of male artist and supportive female other" (28). Nevertheless, Louise Bryant claimed to have realized the ideal of free love in her relationship with John Reed: "We don't interfere with each other at all, we just sort of supplement, and life is very lovely to us – we feel like children who will never grow up" (qtd. in Cott). Their relationship withstood their sexual involvements with others – Reed with unknown women, and Bryant with Eugene O'Neill and Andrew Dasburg – and the two vowed that they would not be like Will Irwin and Inez Haynes, another bohemian couple who, according to Bryant, were "so *jealous* of each other's work"; instead, Bryant confidently told Reed, "You want me to do my best and I want you to – *at any cost!*" (qtd. in Stansell 255).

Reed died of typhus in Moscow in the fall of 1920 and did not live to repudiate his interest in feminism and free love, but such male bohemians as Floyd Dell, always with an eye toward masculine self-interest, later exchanged the ideal of free love for the more conservative ideal of the companionate marriage. Both ideals stressed the integration of love, sex, and intimacy, but the companionate marriage was more aligned with traditional gender roles. Though a onetime proponent of a movement that promised to provide men with more interesting and less costly companions (what he called "Feminism for Men"), Dell instead concluded in 1919, "I did not want to be married to a girl artist; I wanted to be married to a girl who would not put her career before children – or even before me, hideously

reactionary as the thought would have seemed a few years ago" (*Homecoming* 283).

Support of feminism fueled – and was fueled by – *The Masses'* revolts against puritanism and capitalism. To a lesser degree, the magazine's representations of race and ethnicity also contributed to its two-pronged critique of the bourgeois status quo. Of course, bohemian attraction to racial and ethnic difference had long been a defining feature of *la vie bohème*. At the turn into the twentieth century, for example, several Italian restaurants in the Village provided a celebrated port of entry into bohemia and an inspiring glimpse of cultural otherness (a view that was often constructed precisely to appeal to those searching for *la vie bohème*). One proprietor recalled attracting those "impecunious American artists and writers in the neighborhood" by helping to "propagate among Americans a simple, Latin variety of hedonism" (Sermolino 15). Ever the shock troops of gentrification, the artists, in turn, attracted the bourgeoisie. The bohemians of the 1910s shared the physical space of the Village with members of the Italian immigrant community, and though both communities remained largely separate, the bohemians came to appreciate the value of cultural pluralism, both within the context of the rebellion against puritanical constraints and the labor movement. With respect to the latter, such members of *The Masses* group as IWW activist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recognized that "the majority of our workers are foreigners, one or two generations removed" and that the notion of "a melting-pot" failed to honor their ongoing allegiance of their "European home-ties." For Flynn and other contributors to *The Masses*, "internationalism [became] the logical patriotism of a heterogeneous population," and cultural pluralism was a necessary component of any "labor first" ideology (Flynn).

It was not until the 1920s that Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay became a part of the Village bohemian milieu, coediting *The Liberator*, the periodical that grew out of *The Masses*. In the 1910s, the black and white, Harlem and Village scenes did not yet intersect. Nevertheless, McKay had begun reading *The Masses* when he first came to New York in 1914, later reflecting, "I liked its slogans, its make-up, and above all, its cartoons . . . And I felt a special interest in its sympathetic and iconoclastic items about the Negro" (*Long Way* 28–9). Its "iconoclastic" cartoons, however, sometimes edged into racial caricature and essentialism – sometimes in the name of celebrating a supposed racial primitivism. As Leslie Fishbein has argued, "the new radicals in Greenwich Village appropriated blacks as a cultural symbol, an emblem of paganism free of the puritanical repression that plagued whites" (15). Yet, beyond seeking in blackness

something that would facilitate their own revolts against bourgeois respectability, the bohemians of *The Masses* also spoke out forcefully against racial injustice and oppression. Though Eastman believed that "the Negro problem . . . will disappear with the disappearance of economic classes" (qtd. in Morrisson 169), he recognized the urgency of a separate black power movement, noting, "There are forces enough in the conditions of industry and politics in the South to make a Negro Protective Association with a militant spirit a great weapon of democracy" (M. Eastman, "Knowledge" Feb. 1913: 6). Further, writing in support of the NAACP campaign against lynching in 1916, *The Masses* insisted that contributions to that cause would be "a better action on behalf of civilization than merely giving relief to your feelings by denouncing atrocities which happen to be German" ("American Holiday").

*The Masses'* objections to US involvement in World War I ultimately led to the magazine's suppression in the wake of The Espionage Act of 1917. As Cowley observed, the war had the effect of bifurcating the "revolt against puritanism and revolt against capitalism" (*Exile's Return* 66). Dell similarly recalled that the war "brought to an end that glorious intellectual playtime in which art and ideas, free self-expression and the passion of propaganda, were for one moment happily mated" (*Love* 27). In its aftermath, the very bohemian moment that did so much to embrace the "new" and the modern struck Dell, ironically enough, as a last gasp of the old, "a Late-Victorian credulousness, a faith, happy and absurd, in the goodness and beauty of this chaotic universe" (320). Though Dell and Cowley's retrospective accounts minimize the conflicts that did erupt between "self-expression" and ideological commitments in the bohemian 1910s, both recognize that historical events conspired to pry the two currents apart. A growing interest in self-discovery and artistic formalism muted radical politics in the postwar Village – at least until the 1930s, when the Depression once again spurred the search for radical political alternatives and caused many Communist-affiliated writers and intellectuals to disavow those who emphasized "mere bohemianism."

Cowley and Dell's reminiscences point to a further historical irony: the bohemian focus on personal liberty and self-dramatization, once divested of the critique of capitalism that accompanied it in the 1910s, became part of an emerging "consumption ethic" in the 1920s, a new bohemian-bourgeois synthesis that marked a shift from a culture of production to one of consumerism (Cowley, *Exile's Return* 62). As Dell noted, "The American middle class had come to the end of its Puritan phase; it had war-profits to spend, and it was turning to Bohemia to learn how to spend them"



(*Homecoming* 360). Nevertheless, even in these increasingly commodified versions – from arty tearooms to café-cabarets and ever-more expensive studio apartments – and in many nostalgic literary memoirs, “Greenwich Village” continued to hold out the hope of liberation from the past and the possibility of an ecstatic fusion art and love, freedom and happiness. Indeed, as George Chauncey has argued, its bohemian reputation enabled the Village to become increasingly prominent as a site of gay liberation (“Long-Haired Men” 156–9), and later generations of artists and writers still flocked to the Village in search of *la vie bohème*. A flashpoint in the 1910s – especially in its Village incarnation – “bohemia” has always existed as a liminal territory at the boundary of bourgeois life, ever in transition, oscillating between the personal and the political, and open to new forms of cultural accommodation and dissent.

#### NOTES

- 1 On the commodification of the Village, see Ramirez 376–8.
- 2 On Dodge’s authorship, see Adickes 208.